

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN ART EDUCATION

Cultivating Students' Potential from Pre-K through High School

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Artists' Lessons to Thrive! 13.2 Lesley Patterson-Marx: Book Arts as Passages in Time

Big Idea: Time

Lesley Patterson-Marx's studio is filled with intimate collectables that reference passages in time. They include antique photographs, old books, vintage magazines, glass jars filled with notions, and specialty papers. She compiles nostalgic products such as shiny harmonicas, delicate handkerchiefs, and attractive containers to use as structures to design original mixed media book arts projects, prints, and collages. By arranging other people's discarded and forgotten memorabilia, Patterson-Marx creates original artworks whose consolidated parts extend beyond their initial meanings.

Due to her competence in creating with various art production processes and trust in her artistic intuition, Patterson-Marx has developed an ability to design complex arrangements that feel mysterious and fun. For each artwork, the artist invests substantial time to make her designs unified. She spends hours finding, purchasing, and categorizing found objects. She thumbs through old books and magazines to locate just the right images to incorporate into her works. During daily walks, she collects natural resources, including dried leaves and insect wings, to add authentic organic components to her designs. She then assembles and overlays her selection of sundry materials with different colors, textures, and patterns to develop rich layers of information. Each carefully chosen object adds a special touch and meaning to her creations.

For her artwork *Radiant Paint Box* (Figures 13.2.1 and 13.2.2), Patterson-Marx appropriated a watercolor paint tin to house eight miniature books. The paint tin is reminiscent of a book in that it



FIGURE 13.2.1 Lesley Patterson-Marx, *Radiant Paint Box* (Interior), 2012, mixed media, 9 x 3 in. (22.86 x 7.62 cm).

Source: Courtesy of the artist; lesleypattersonmarx.com.



FIGURE 13.2.2 Lesley Patterson-Marx, *Radiant Paint Box* (Exterior).

Source: Courtesy of the artist; lesleypattersonmarx.com.

opens and closes. Its structure adds a sense of nostalgia to the work because it references a bygone era of American manufacturing with its old-fashioned package design. Through its miniature books nested in the box's empty paint pans, Patterson-Marx made visual references to what the original paint tin would have look like when it was new and saturated with pigment. Each miniature book has a nature inspired theme: white represents light; yellow glistens like the sun; green looks like grass; blue mimics the sky; purple symbolizes flowers; red signifies birds; brown suggests trees; and black embodies the earth.

Patterson-Marx formed *Radiant Paint Box's* miniature books using materials including colored paper, wood, and the shells of robin eggs. She integrated old photographs and sewn drawings to form their designs. Many of the artwork's miniature books have accordion folds and delicate embroidery thread ties. Patterson-Marx applied decorative papercutting techniques to form her light, sun, and sky books. To reinforce the artwork's nature theme, she collaged printed foliage from an old botanical book to its interior spaces, paintbrush, and exterior casing. All parts interconnect, thereby resulting in *Radiant Paint Box's* harmonious design.

As *Radiant Paint Box* indicates, Patterson-Marx constructs intimate artworks that have contemporary value using old collectables. The qualities of her artworks invite audiences to want to hold them, look at them more closely, and admire their distinct components. Her mindful creations become sentimental spaces that summon viewers to ask questions about their parts' origins and invent their own storylines that expand upon the works' intended meanings.

Essential/Guiding Questions

1. Patterson-Marx refers to her artworks as having a strong feminine crafting tradition, even though she applies fine art production skills including bookmaking, printmaking, and collaging. How might Patterson-Marx's use of crafting materials and fine art processes shape the meaning of the works that she produces?
2. In your opinion, how do materials and memories from the past teach us about who we are today? Why do you think that Patterson-Marx chooses to create contemporary art using vintage materials?

Preparation

Students will research time idioms including "time flies," "turn back time," and "behind the times," to discuss their meanings. They will collect found objects and historic memorabilia to prepare for their art production activity.

Daily Learning Targets

I can create a book arts project, print, or original collage that focuses on the big idea of time.

- I can form my design using found objects, historic memorabilia, and a time idiom that I have researched.
- I can integrate a balanced and unified design that shows effective craftsmanship.
- I can display my artwork and create signage that explains the meaning and intent of my artwork and its time idiom.

National Core Arts Anchor Standards 2, 6, 8, and 11

www.nationalartsstandards.org



FIGURE 18.8 Ansel Adams, *The Tetons and Snake River*, 1941.
Source: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

photography. In 1900, Acland photographed portraits and travel landscapes using the Sanger Shepherd process. Acland took three consecutive black-and-white photographs with alternating red, green, and blue filters to create a single color photograph. This process was much slower than typical black and white photography. A few decades later, the film industry became modernized through the combination of Technicolor (all three primary colors) and sound, which resulted in colorful traditional animated films such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and the musical film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).

In 1973, Na June Paik created an innovative video art production called *Global Groove*. This electronic video collage fused psychedelic colors with the performing arts, international advertisements, and kaleidoscopic marks to present a futuristic vision about the possibilities of global television communications. Such creative innovations—combined with advances in graphics and computer technologies—impacted the art, film, and entertainment industries. For example, filmmakers use computer graphics to invent convincing imaginary worlds. In the 1980s, they began commissioning game designers to transform epic and animated movies into marketable electronic games for children and adults to earn greater profits (Brown, 2008; Dixon & Foster, 2008). New-media arts festivals have become popular events across the planet. They bring thousands of people together to interact with and enjoy digital artworks. Some technology specialists apply four-dimensional presentation methods to

synchronize physical sensations such as movement, smells, and water and wind elements with films, theme park rides, and interactive works to give audiences greater sensory experiences. Students may recall some of their personal engagements with these technologies.

Contemporary artists, photographers, graphic designers, and hobbyists use software to view, create, edit, draw, and manipulate images on a screen using a mouse, digital stylus, and their fingertips or bodies. Artists can shade their creations, add painterly qualities, apply textures, stretch forms into different directions, construct virtual structures, incorporate text, layer images, and more. Technological productions may be screen-based or extend beyond the screen to become physical products including art installations, three-dimensional printings (see Artists' Lessons to Thrive! 14.2 on Christopher Williams), and interactive art forms. Leslie Patterson-Marx (Artists' Lessons to Thrive! 13.2) photographed the processes of her drawing on a vintage photograph to create a stop-motion animation and an artist book (Figure 18.9). With a wide range of resources available, creative



FIGURE 18.9 Leslie Patterson-Marx, *Hydrangea Girl*, found book, found photograph, acrylic ink, graphite, Plexiglas, 6 × 4.25 × 1.25 in. (15.24 × 10.79 × 3.17 cm), 2013.
Source: Courtesy of the artist; lesleypattersonmarx.com